Event Report

Human Security and JICA's Research Directions

Contextual Background

On 22 October 2025, the Indo-Pacific Research Centre (IPRC) and the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP) co-organised a special online discussion featuring Professor Mine Yoichi on the theme of Human Security and JICA's Research Directions. Professor Mine is the Executive Director of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development and a professor at Doshisha University's Graduate School of Global Studies in Japan. His research interests include African studies, world history, and human security, and he is widely recognised for his contribution to advancing the intellectual and operational frameworks of Japan's development cooperation policy. Professor Mine's notable works include Connecting Africa and Asia: Afrasia as a Benign Community (Routledge, 2022) and the co-edited volume Human Security Norms in East Asia (Palgrave, 2018), both of which are regarded as significant contributions to the study of human security and transregional cooperation. His forthcoming book, An Oral History of Development Cooperation: Experiences of Japan and Its Partners (Springer), is scheduled for publication in March 2026.

This report summarizes Professor Mine's presentation which traced the evolution of human security as both an academic concept and a guiding principle of Japan's foreign policy, especially within the structure of the JICA. His talk also illuminated the philosophical underpinnings, dual developmental and peace-oriented threads, and practical applications of human security as envisioned by JICA's Ogata Sadako Research Institute.

Human security represents a paradigm shift away from the traditional, state-centric notion of security towards an individual-centric understanding that prioritises the protection and empowerment of human beings. In conventional realist frameworks, the nation-state is the central referent of security; under human security, the focus shifts to the individual as the fundamental unit of analysis. Security thus becomes both an objective con-

dition — freedom from violence and deprivation — and a subjective feeling of safety, dignity, and agency. This reorientation finds its philosophical roots in Thomas Hobbes's social contract theory, which justifies the creation of the state as a means to escape the "war of all against all." However, as Akihiko Tanaka, President of the JICA Ogata Research Institute, argues in his paper *Toward a Theory of Human Security*, the complexity of 21st century challenges — climate change, pandemics, refugee flows, and cyber insecurities — has rendered this Hobbesian logic inadequate. In today's interconnected world, the pursuit of national security in isolation often deepens global insecurity.

Hence, human security emerges as a new social contract, one that binds individuals, states, and institutions in a collective effort to secure lives, livelihoods, and dignity. This new framework demands multiple security providers, from the United Nation (UN) system and regional organisations to national governments, villages and neighbourhood communities, business communities, and religious communities. By shifting focus from military protection to human empowerment, human security seeks to address both structural inequalities and immediate humanitarian crises.
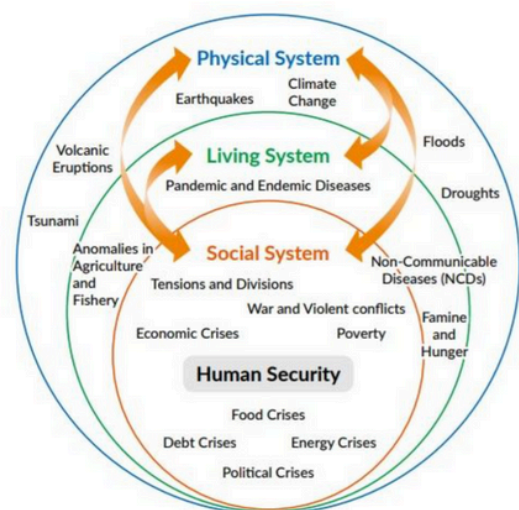
Source: Adapted from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), *Human Security Today No. 2: Human Security, Politics and Society under Compounded Crises (2024)*.

Key Takeaways 1: Human Security as Japan's Guiding Development Principle

One of the core takeaways from the discussion is the institutionalization of human security within Japan's development cooperation framework. The concept has evolved from an abstract moral principle to a concrete policy doctrine, enshrined in the 2023 Development Cooperation Charter, which declares human security as a "guiding principle" of Japan's foreign aid and international engagement. The Charter positions human security as essential to "building nations and communities that enable each individual to live happily and with dignity, free from fear and want." It reaffirms Japan's commitment to the universal values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, while emphasising protection, empowerment, and solidarity among diverse actors as the three pillars of Japan's development philosophy.

In the presentation, it was emphasised that this principle is not merely rhetorical, it provides the intellectual and operational foundation for JICA's global projects. Human security serves as one of the two pillars of Japan's foreign policy, complementing traditional security (national defence and strategic partnerships) with multilateral, people-centred engagement. While Japan strengthens its deterrence posture under the U.S. alliance, it also projects a softer, normative identity through JICA's developmental diplomacy.

Mine highlighted that Japan's approach to human security remains distinctive because it reflects both universal ideals and Asian contextual values. It prioritises "investment in people," an idea deeply rooted in Japan's post-war reconstruction experience, while simultaneously promoting a non-interventionist and inclusive model that resonates with the Global South. In this sense, Japan's pursuit of human security represents a fusion of moral conviction and pragmatic diplomacy, enabling Tokyo to exercise normative leadership amid growing geopolitical fragmentation.

## Key Takeaway 2: JICA's Integration of 'Development' in Promoting Human Security

The first intellectual thread of human security arises from development studies, particularly from the United Nation Development Programme's (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report and Amartya Sen's capabilities approach. Sen defined human development as the process of expanding people's choices and freedoms to live lives they have reason to value. Human security builds upon this foundation by recognising that without protection from external shocks—such as pandemics, natural disasters, or conflict—these freedoms remain fragile and reversible.

Professor Mine visualised human development as an upward trajectory, driven by education, health, and economic opportunities.

Resilience for Human Security

Figure 1: Human Development and Human Security
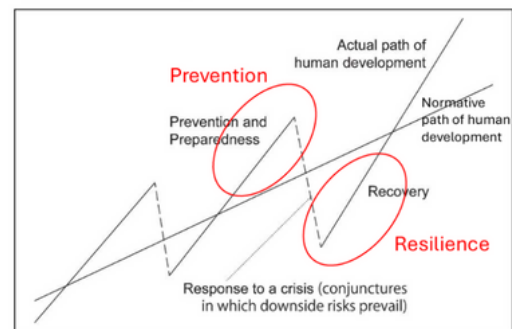
Source: Adapted from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), *Human Security Today No. 2: Human Security, Politics and Society under Compounded Crises (2024).*

However, real life is marked by fluctuations—recessions, wars, or diseases—that curtail people's ability to pursue valued goals. Human security thus functions as a resilience mechanism: it safeguards development gains from erosion, ensuring that societies can recover and rebuild. This framework emphasises the twin principles of protection (against risks) and empowerment (to recover agency).

Human security's developmental thread focuses on confronting structural violence, a term coined by Johan Galtung to describe social structures that systematically prevent people from realising their potential. Poverty, inequality, and exclusion are forms of slow violence that require sustained policy attention. JICA's approach integrates this understanding by promoting inclusive economic growth, social safety nets, and capacity-building programs that empower individuals to withstand crises. For instance, in the Pacific Islands, JICA projects have incorporated human security into multi-sectoral initiatives that link climate adaptation with community livelihoods. In Africa and Southeast Asia, JICA's human security framework has guided projects in health security, disaster resilience, and education reform, each designed to enhance people's agency rather than perpetuate dependency. The development strand therefore, operationalises human security not as charity but as co-creation, a partnership model grounded in local ownership and empowerment.

Key Takeaway 3: JICA's Integration of 'Peace' in Promoting Human Security

The second thread of human security draws from peace studies and the humanitarian legacy of Sadako Ogata, after whom JICA's Ogata Research Institute is named. As former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ogata revolutionised global refugee policy by extending protection to internally displaced persons (IDPs), those who remain within national borders yet face existential threats comparable to refugees. Her work emphasised that every individual, regardless of nationality or geography, deserves protection and dignity.

By merging Ogata's protection-oriented approach with Galtung's peace theory, JICA developed a comprehensive vision of peace that transcends the absence of war. Galtung differentiates between direct violence (physical harm or persecution) and structural violence (institutionalised inequality). Peace, therefore, entails the absence of both, a condition in which individuals can flourish physically, psychologically, and socially.

Professor Mine explained that JICA's conceptual model synthesises Ogata's humanitarianism with Sen's developmental empowerment, resulting in a dual focus: protecting vulnerable populations from immediate harm while building long-term resilience against structural injustices. This is reflected in JICA's efforts to support refugees, rebuild post-conflict communities, and facilitate peacebuilding through local participation. He also pointed out that human security provides a normative bridge between humanitarian assistance and development aid, two fields that historically operated in silos. The integrated approach enables agencies like JICA to respond flexibly to crises that blur the line between emergency relief and long-term recovery, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through this peace-oriented strand, JICA contributes to global solidarity, reaffirming that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of dignity, opportunity, and justice.

> .... But many of the most profound changes in human society have come from crises - from war, economic depression, natural disaster. While great religions often move the human spirit through the sublimeness of their messages, they also carry in their messages the fear of eventual punishment. Much change comes from a fear for human survival.
>
> - Mahbub Ul Haq, Reflections on Human Development, 1995.

Key Takeaway 4: Navigating Global Challenges

The final takeaway from the discussion concerned the political headwinds and philosophical dilemmas confronting the human security agenda. The retreat of multilateralism, the shrinking of aid budgets, and the rise of nationalist populism have undermined collective responses to transnational risks. In addition, some states in the Global South view human security with suspicion, associating it with Western-led interventionism under the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) framework.

In this context, Japan's non-Western democratic identity and its consistent record of non-coercive engagement uniquely position it to champion a non-interventionist, multilateral model of human security. However, Japan's current political discourse — marked by debates on immigration, nuclear energy, and national defence — poses challenges for sustaining the human security vision. Yet, the discussion expressed confidence that JICA's intellectual and institutional legacy, built over three decades, remains robust enough to withstand such fluctuations. It was reiterated that Japan's contribution to global human security must continue to be rooted in partnership, solidarity, and respect for sovereignty.

In an era of geopolitical uncertainty and compounded crises, Japan and JICA's enduring commitment to human-centred development demonstrates how middle powers can exercise normative influence without coercion, through empathy, expertise, and example.

CONCLUSION

The ISDP–IPRC discussion with Professor Mine offered a panoramic view of how JICA's human security framework has matured into Japan's defining contribution to global governance. Rooted in the moral legacies of Sadako Ogata, Amartya Sen, and Mahbub ul Haq, and refined by the policy leadership of Akihiko Tanaka, the concept now anchors Japan's diplomacy, development, and peacebuilding efforts.

Through its dual focus on developmental empowerment and peaceful protection, human security embodies Japan's effort to humanise international relations and make the global system responsive to the vulnerabilities of real people. As the world grapples with climate instability, inequality, pandemics, and displacement, JICA's evolving research — from dashboards to regional

projects — illustrates that the promise of human security lies not merely in theory but in measurable, actionable progress.

Ultimately, as Professor Mine underscored, human security endures as both a policy framework and a moral compass, reminding the international community that the true measure of security is not the strength of armies, but the dignity, freedom, and hope of human lives.

Disclaimer: This report is solely based on the discussion and does not represent the views of either IPRC, ISDP or JICA

This report has been produced with the support of Anubhav Shankar Goswami & Quintafila Aufar Salihin

The Indo-Pacific Research Centre (IPRC)

The Indo-Pacific Research Centre (IPRC) engages with the significant challenges of our century and in our region: socio-economic development, human security, and geo-strategic governance. We advance understanding about the political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental issues in the Indo-Pacific region. The IPRC undertakes multi- and trans-disciplinary research in the region and supports Murdoch University's engagement with the region. Our location on the west coast of Australia enables the centre to provide distinctive insights into the changes and challenges in the Indian Ocean Rim. Demand for contemporary understanding of the region and its challenges presents exciting opportunities for the IPRC to pursue research and engagement goals that enhance governmental, business, and civil society objectives in the region.

Find us on LinkedIn:
Indo-Pacific Research Centre, Murdoch University

IPRC@murdoch.edu.au
https://www.murdoch.edu.au/research/iprc

SPEAKER

Prof. Mine Yoichi

Professor Mine Yoichi is the Executive Director at the JICA Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development and a Visiting Professor at Graduate School of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University. An expert in human security, African studies, and development economics, he was educated at Kyoto University. He has published several award-winning Japanese books on development and conflict resolution in Africa. His English works include Preventing Violent Conflicts in Africa: Inequalities, Perceptions and Institutions (Palgrave, 2013), Human Security Norms in East Asia (Palgrave, 2018), and Connecting Africa and Asia: Afrasia as a Benign Community (Routledge, 2022).

Institute for Security & Development Policy

MU Murdoch University | Indo-Pacific Research Centre

Ngala Kwop Biddi.
Building a brighter future, together.

Enquiries:
IPRC@murdoch.edu.au